

CHAPTER THREE

FROM VISIONS TO HISTORY: THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

Who would conquer this new Persian empire whose first king was Cyrus? A young king lay dying in Babylon. His attendants whisper softly to themselves. Has he been poisoned? Will he die? Many doubt it. Only ten years before, King Alexander of Greece crossed the Hellespont River in Asia Minor and threw a spear of defiance deep into the soil of the Persian Empire. In little more than three years, the strongholds of Persia collapsed under Alexander's sword, and the course of the world was changed forever. But the king who was declared a god proved only to be human. Alexander the Great died without an heir, and his massive empire was divided between four of his generals.

This is world history. Yet some 200 years before the events, the Prophet Daniel foretold them. Inspired by God, Daniel wrote an accurate prediction of history. Jesus Christ placed confidence in the truth of this prophet's predictions (Matthew 24:15), and so can we. While most Biblical prophecies await fulfillment, we'll study three passages which have been fulfilled either partially or fully. Maps are included in this book to show the extent of the Babylonian and Persian empires during the time of Daniel as well as the future Greek empire.

A. A RAM AND A GOAT

According to world history, sometime around the sixth century B.C. the world was divided into four great empires; Egypt, Media, Lydia, and Babylon. Let's take a look at Daniel's dream about a ram and goat and learn something about history at the same time from Daniel chapter 8.

1. Daniel saw the details of this prophecy in a vision while he was in the palace in Shushan (Susa), located in west-central present-day Iran.
2. Verses 3 and 4 describe a ram with two horns, one of which eventually grows longer than the other. God tells the meaning of this vision in verse 20: "the two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia."

"I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great." Daniel 8:3-4

"The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia." Daniel 8:20

- a. Remember in chapter one of this study we learned about Cyrus, the Persian King, and that he was mentioned in the Old Testament. He subjected the

Median Empire to Persia's Dynasty and it became Medo-Persia. This was the land in which Daniel was thrown into the lion's den because the law of the Medes and Persians could not be broken.

- b. Medes, the weaker kingdom, is represented by the shorter horn on the ram. Persia, the stronger kingdom, is the other horn which grew longer.
3. In Daniel 8:5-8 Daniel sees a shaggy goat, with a prominent horn, coming from the West. It shattered the two horns of the ram and then trampled it. The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off and four other horns grew in its place.

Do you recognize this historical account? Let's read God's interpretation of the meaning of the goat and ram - "the shaggy goat is the king of Greece and the large horn between his eyes is the first king." Daniel 8:21. This king was Alexander the Great. He came from the West, the country of Greece, and almost like a speeding bullet conquered Turkey before crossing the Hellespont River which separated West from East, Greece from Persia. He is remembered as the man who sat down and cried because there were no more kingdoms for him to conquer. And yet when he was little more than 30 years old, he died and his kingdom was divided into four parts, each controlled by a general. This explains the meaning of the four horns.

B. THE GOLDEN STATUE

He may have been the ruler of the most splendid kingdom on earth, but for one inexplicable dream King Nebuchadnezzar was deeply troubled and lost sleep. He threatened to kill all the wise men in Babylon for want of an answer. In fact he was so desperate, he required the interpreter to first describe the dream before interpreting it. With so many lives on the line, including his own, Daniel stepped out in faith and inquired of the Lord who enabled him to tell the dream.

"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:31-35

1. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar required the wise men to first describe his dream before interpreting it? How was Daniel able to do what the other wise men could not?
2. Let's review the biblical imagery of the dream along with what it represents:

- a. The statue was enormous, bright, and terrifying.
 - b. It had a golden head representing King Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian Empire.
 - c. It's arms and breast were of silver, representing an inferior kingdom that would come after.
 - d. Bronze thighs and belly marked the third successive kingdom to rule the earth.
 - e. A fourth kingdom with legs of iron would then come, crushing all the other kingdoms. This kingdom, however, had feet mixed of iron and clay (because its people were also mixed and not united).
 - f. A stone which was not cut by human hands smashed the image:
 1. It crushed its feet of mixed iron and clay.
 2. The statue crumbled, its respective parts fell to the floor and became like chaff in the wind.
 3. The stone became a great mountain and filled the entire earth.
3. Notice the interpretation God gives through Daniel 2:36-45. Daniel states that the golden head was Nebuchadnezzar. Most all Bible believing scholars agree that the kingdoms represented by the parts of the body of silver, bronze, and iron and clay were the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires.

It is beyond the scope of this study to adequately discuss the iron legs and iron and clay feet which were smashed by the stone. However, many theologians believe that these represent the Roman Empire at the time of Christ, as well as a future revived Roman Empire in the end times. The revived Empire will be smashed as all human government is abolished when Jesus Christ, the Stone, sets up His own Kingdom and then, as many Christians believe, he begins His millennial reign of 1000 years on earth.

C. FOUR BEASTS FROM THE SEA

It was Daniel's turn to be deeply troubled by a dream. During the reign of Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Daniel had a dream about a lion, bear, leopard, and another fearsome beast. Read Daniel 7:1-28. The angel Gabriel interpreted the meaning of the animals for Daniel: they reflected the kingdoms of the earth.

1. The first beast was a lion. Remember that in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the various parts of the statue represented Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire. Comparatively in Daniel's dream, Babylon was the lion with eagle wings (Other references to Babylon as a lion and an eagle are found in Jeremiah 4:7 and Ezekiel 17:3.)
2. The second beast, was a bear which was raised up on one side. The imagery is similar to Daniel's ram and goat vision—the ram, having two horns, one longer than the other. This was Medo-Persia, Persia being the stronger part of the kingdom. The bear ate “much flesh” and had three ribs in its mouth. Compare this imagery with the quick and violent Persian takeovers of Media, Lydia, and Babylon.
 “And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh!’” Daniel 7:5
3. The third beast, the leopard, is Greece. Note the four heads of the leopard, reminiscent of the four horns that grew from Daniel's shaggy goat and, of course, Alexander's four succeeding generals who split Alexander's kingdom when he died..
 “After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.” Daniel 4:6
4. The fourth beast (7:7), perhaps too terrible to name, crushed everything in its path. In comparison with Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it is the Roman Empire. We read that its ten horns represent ten kings and that three of those horns were uprooted when another little but very powerful horn grew out. The little powerful horn, we learn will persecute the saints and speak against God (7:21-25). Many believe this will be a person who will be the anti-Christ who will rule over the revived Roman Empire.

D. PERSEPOLIS REMEMBERS

Three dreams, each was a forewarning to Daniel of things to come. Golden Babylon, the lion, was overtaken by the silver dynasty of Persia, the bear. In turn Persia was overthrown by the bronze Greek, Alexander the Great, the leopard. And certainly the Greek Empire was crushed by a fourth kingdom—Rome. Most of this is now history, its memories resident within the remains of the ancient ruins of Persepolis.

On the Staircase of the Apadana (the reception palace) at Takht-Tamshid are pictures representing 23 of the various countries which became subject to the Persian Empire. One of the 23 images is of the empire of Babylonia. Gold, silver, cloth, and a bison are pictured being paid as tribute to the Persian king. Persepolis with its palace and treasures was destroyed when Alexander the Great and his Greek army burned the city. Nevertheless, traces of the Babylonian,

Persian, and Greek kingdoms can each be found among the ruins.

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1. How can God's power to predict governments and kingdoms in the Book of Daniel such as the coming of the Greek empire under Alexander the Great be a comfort to us as we face uncertain political changes in this world?
2. How can this section help you in praying for Christians who are being persecuted by government officials in such countries as Sudan, Turkmenistan or China?
3. If you have time, study the overall prophecies of Daniel. Why is there such a strong emphasis on the future history of the non-Jewish nations (the Gentiles)?
4. Why do liberal theologians who believe the Bible was not inspired by God deny that Daniel wrote the Book of Daniel, claiming someone wrote these chapters several hundred years later and used the name of Daniel?